

WANDERERS GO BACK TO THE TOP

By MICHAEL KNOX, Barking 1, Wycombe Wanderers 2

WYCOMBE Wanderers appeared to have frittered away two more points in their bid to retain their Rothmans Isthmian League Division One championship when they conceded a penalty one minute from the end of Saturday's match against Barking at Lodge Avenue.

Barking, trailing 2-1, made final a desperate attack, in which their coloured striker was clearly brought down by John Maskell inside the penalty area. Right-back Bob Amirakis, without a failure in 11 attempts this season, struck the spot-kick perfectly but to his dismay the ball struck a post was was frantically cleared.

So Wycombe held on to the narrow lead and picked up a further three points to take them back to the top of the table. But a frantic finish seemed most unlikely when two goals in a seven minute spell during the second half through Dave Alexander and Tony Horseman put them in a comfortable lead.

But then Barking unleashed their most dangerous assaults in the closing minutes and pulled back a goal through Tony Marchant, before missing that penalty. But I think even they would admit that Wanderers were the better side.

For the first hour of the match it seemed that hard and bumpy Barking pitch would win the day. A strong breeze added to the difficulties as the ball more often than not rose above head high after bouncing.

Control was thus almost impossible with two strong defences well in command and a goalless draw seemed on the cards as the match dragged on through more than an hour's dreary and unexciting football.

week and was out with a damaged ankle.

Alexander had contributed little to the match when in the 65th minute he was laid low after a clash of heads with Barking's Chris Ballard. He looked distinctly groggy when he rose to his feet but two minutes after his recovery he scored the opening goal — what does Jock Sheppard put in his magic sponge, I wonder!

Following a corner on the right, the ball bounced around the penalty area before coming out to Alexander. He cleverly beat two men on the edge of the penalty area before placing his shot cleverly just inside the right hand post. Goalkeeper Alan Dear may

have been put off by a slight deflection.

A vintage goal seven minutes later by Horseman seemed to have sewn up the game. Full-back Paul Birdseye tried a speculative shot from 30 yards. It was intercepted by Horseman, who in a flash controlled the bouncing ball, turned and sent a low shot underneath the sprawling Dear.

Wycombe, with Kennedy working hard in mid-field, looked set to overrun their dispirited opponents and so claim the sponsors bonus for a victory by three clear goals. The Barking defence absorbed a good deal of pressure before cutting the deficit three minutes from time.

Mid-field man David Miller knocked the ball into the penalty area where former England youth international Tony Marchant headed neatly over Maskell who had mistakenly come off his line.

Back came Wycombe and

Holifield somehow contrived to miss from three yards following a headed flick by Horseman.

Holifield's shot hit both the goalkeeper and post before going for a corner. But the main drama was reserved for the other end and Wycombe can thank the square post for their survival.

Blues deserved their success. Their slight supremacy was gained by their defenders moving up into mid-field and joining the attack. Skipper Keith Mead was particularly prominent in this department while not neglecting his defensive duties.

Holifield, who moved up into the forward line in Macrae's absence flitted in and out of the game as usual while Dylan Evans found it difficult to come to terms with the awkward conditions. He missed a great chance in the first half by ballooning the ball over the top. Barking doubtlessly lacked

the influence of the famous twins Roger and Ian Morgan. Both missed last week's match against Ilford through injury and as the team won, their manager decided to retain the same side.

Chris Ballard worked hard to good effect in mid-field sending over a series of dangerous crosses, while the striking duo Peter Burton and Dennis Francis proved quite a handful. Burton was particularly good in the air.

Wycombe could have done with him as a target man, for until they find someone able to turn high crosses into goals, they are going to struggle to score.

BARKING: A. Dear, J. Ford, R. Amirakis, K. Barrett, A. Marchant, C. Ballard, G. Ferry, D. Miller, P. Burton, D. Francis, K. Varney. Sub: T. Eustace (not used).

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell, P. Birdseye, D. Bullock, K. Mead, J. Delaney, T. Reedon, M. Holifield, H. Kennedy, A. Horseman, D. Alexander, D. Evans. Sub: R. Eaton (not used).

Referee: R. Sibley.
Half-time 0-0. **Scorers:** Barking — Marchant (87 mins.); Wycombe — Alexander (68), Horseman (75).

The man who effected the change was Wycombe's mid-field player Dave Alexander, who was only brought into the side at the last minute for the injured striker Bruce Macrae. Macrae had suffered at the hands — or the feet — of the Swedes in mid-